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**Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations**

# International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development

## Report of the Secretary-General

*Summary*

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/227, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to improve the international response to natural disasters and to report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. It provides an overview of the occurrence of disasters associated with natural hazards and highlights emerging trends. The report explains why a resilience approach is key to addressing recurrent crises and presents an outline of humanitarian actors' contribution to strengthening the resilience of people. It also provides an update on the international humanitarian system's efforts to strengthen leadership, coordination and accountability. The report looks at progress made in various areas and concludes with recommendations to improve response to natural disasters.

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# I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/227, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to improve international response to natural disasters. It covers the period from 1 June 2011 to 31 May 2012. More recent information has been included where relevant.

# II. Overview

2. Humanitarian needs around the world are rising in part owing to the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters and the growing number of vulnerable people. In many parts of the world recurrent disasters have eroded families' coping mechanisms, overwhelmed community- and national-level response capacities and reversed development gains in areas such as education and health. Governments, international development and humanitarian actors must help communities build their ability to withstand and recover from disasters. To achieve this, a comprehensive approach is needed, bringing together national-led prevention, preparedness, relief, recovery and development programming.

3. The report describes the impact of disasters during the reporting period. It explains why a resilience approach is key to addressing recurrent crises and outlines humanitarian actors' contribution to strengthening people's resilience. It provides an update on the international humanitarian system's efforts to strengthen accountability, coordination and leadership, and concludes with recommendations to improve response to disasters and to build commitment to the resilience approach. The theme of resilience will reappear in other reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, which will address resilience from developmental and peacebuilding perspectives.

# III. The year in review: key facts

4. There were two main drivers of humanitarian need during the reporting period: drought and disasters associated with hydro-meteorological hazards, such as floods and storms. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters registered 332 natural disasters in 2011. That was lower than any year in the previous 10 years, but the impact of those disasters on people was among the worst of the decade. Natural disasters affected 244.7 million people (the highest number since 2003), claimed an estimated 30,773 lives and caused record economic losses estimated at over $366 billion. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimated that in 2011, at least 14.9 million people were displaced by natural disasters, most of them weather-related. Eighty-nine per cent of those people were in Asia.

5. Drought triggered major crises in 2011 that continued to have a severe impact in 2012. In the Horn of Africa, drought affected 13.3 million people in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia in 2011. As a result of late and erratic rains and high food prices in 2012, 9.1 million people in the region were still in need of humanitarian assistance.

6. In the Sahel, the combination of drought, high food prices, displacement and chronic poverty resulted in a food and nutrition crisis that is affecting more than

18 million people, including 1.1 million children under the age of 5, in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. In northern Mali and Nigeria, the crisis is compounded by insecurity and conflict.

7. In Afghanistan, drought affected 3 million people in 2011. Recurrent drought also affected countries in the Middle East, including the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. In Brazil, the worst drought in decades affected almost 4 million people, while prolonged drought affected an estimated 200,000 families in Paraguay. Drought conditions were also recorded in Mexico and Cuba.

8. Storms, cyclones and torrential monsoon rains triggered severe flooding in Pakistan, where over 5 million people required humanitarian assistance. The Philippines experienced a national record of 33 natural disasters, including Tropical Cyclone Washi (Sendong), which caused 1,495 deaths and affected 624,600 people.

9. In Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam, storms, torrential rains and floods killed more than 800 people and left 7.5 million homeless. Tropical depression 12-E caused flooding and mudslides that affected 2 million people in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua in October 2011.

10. Flood-related events affected 3.5 million people in South America, mostly in Brazil, Colombia and Peru. In Brazil, heavy rains affected an estimated 2.1 million people, while flooding displaced 1.3 million people in Colombia.

11. The Central Emergency Response Fund allocated $212.8 million, about 40 per cent of its total allocations, in response to drought, earthquakes, floods and storms. The Fund allocated $63.8 million to the Sahel emergency and $90.3 million to the Horn of Africa. Country-based pooled funds, known as Emergency Response Funds and Common Humanitarian Funds, allocated $127 million, or 28 per cent of their total allocations, for the response to emergencies caused by natural disasters.

## IV. Building resilience: linking relief and development approaches

12. Lessons learned from the response to recurrent humanitarian crises have underscored the need to build communities' resilience to shocks by addressing the physical, social, economic and environmental elements that make large numbers of people vulnerable. Governments, regional organizations, development and humanitarian actors need to work together on national-led strategies that focus on achieving this.

13. The importance of a resilience-based approach was set out in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.[1] It was reaffirmed in the outcome document of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which called for "disaster risk reduction and the building of resilience to disasters to be addressed with a renewed sense of urgency" (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex, para. 186).

14. An impressive example of a national response to recurrent food crises is the "Nigeriens nourish Nigeriens" initiative of the Government of Niger. This five-year initiative is strengthening communities' resilience to food crises through

[1] A/CONF.206/6 and Corr.1, chap. I, resolution 2.

diversification of agricultural production and improvement of rural infrastructure, trading and market access. The plan aims to feed 5.5 million Nigeriens in 2012 and has widespread support from United Nations agencies and bilateral and multilateral donors, including international financial institutions. The estimated cost of the initiative in 2012 is over $150 million.

15. Encouraging commitments have also been made at the regional level to strengthen resilience to drought and subsequent food crises. In May 2012, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development adopted a regional drought disaster resilience and sustainability platform to support the drought-resilience strategies of national Governments and regional organizations and to mobilize resources and facilitate knowledge exchange. On 18 June 2012, the European Commission convened a high-level meeting on the Sahel at which affected Governments, United Nations agencies, regional organizations and multilateral financial institutions agreed to build the region's resilience to food crises.[2]

16. Building resilience over the long term is a Government responsibility that is supported by development programming. Humanitarian programmes can contribute by improving the coverage of basic social services and their adaptive capacity; strengthening social safety nets; encouraging better integration of disaster risk reduction into all phases of emergency response; producing longer-term planning time frames and efforts, especially in protracted crises; and mobilizing more stable funding to support these efforts.

**Preparedness**

17. Preparedness helps to save lives and reduce physical and psychological trauma. It enables early action, thereby mitigating physical damage and economic loss. For example, in Bangladesh, an innovative cyclone shelter programme has dramatically reduced cyclone mortality over the past four decades. Chile's 8.8-magnitude earthquake in 2010 killed only one person out of every 595 affected, thanks largely to building codes and other disaster risk reduction measures. The Haitian earthquake of the same year, though significantly less powerful, killed one in every 15 affected people. Emergency preparedness is critical to both short- and long-term resilience-building programmes.

18. Investing in preparedness and disaster risk reduction is demonstrably more cost-effective than financing relief operations. However, funding for preparedness and disaster risk reduction remains extremely low and is typically provided immediately after a crisis rather than in anticipation of potential risks. In 2011, the estimated funding for emergency preparedness totalled $158.7 million, or 1.5 per cent of country-allocable humanitarian aid. Over the past decade, the top 20 recipients of humanitarian assistance spent less than 1 per cent of humanitarian funding on preparedness. This is the equivalent of 62 cents out of every $100 spent. Between 2000 and 2009, the top 40 recipients of official development assistance spent an average of only 0.9 per cent, or $3.7 billion, on disaster risk reduction activities, including preparedness.

19. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the United Nations Development Group and the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster

[2] The joint statement of the meeting can be accessed at http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/20120618_sahel-conference_joint_statement_en.pdf.

Reduction continue their efforts to support national capacities for emergency preparedness. During the reporting period, the Governments of Afghanistan, Ghana, Haiti, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines conducted joint simulation exercises with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to test emergency response procedures. The simulations have helped national responders work better together and with international humanitarian partners.

20. For Governments and international development and humanitarian actors, an important preparedness measure is the availability of standardized data sets prior to crises. Data sets that identify the locations of social services such as health, water and infrastructure, including roads, significantly improve the speed and effectiveness of local and international responses by helping to target limited resources and inform decision-making. The open data platform adopted by several Governments is a positive model that requires application in more countries.

**Early action**

21. Early warning systems ensure that communities are helped before they erode their productive assets. National Government ownership and the ability to mobilize appropriate responses in a timely manner are required to translate early warning into early action. An important prerequisite is the availability of flexible funding and financing mechanisms able to release funds on the basis of early warning indicators, rather than having to wait until a crisis begins. Response decisions should be based on evidence and on an in-depth understanding of local needs, coping mechanisms and vulnerabilities. Whenever possible, international assistance should support and strengthen local coping mechanisms.

22. Early warning of the impact of the Sahel drought in late 2011 led countries such as Niger and Mauritania to develop emergency response plans. It led members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to adopt a Sahel strategy in early 2012, prompting early cash transfers, school feeding, livelihood building and malnutrition prevention throughout the region. This prevented many people from slipping into crisis later in the year.

23. In Mozambique, lives were saved because communities issued early warning signals during storms using radios and warning flags, coupled with Government actions such as resettling people on higher ground. The Government's commitment and budget allocations have helped pre-position resources in areas that are inaccessible during floods.

**Early recovery**

24. Early recovery ensures that humanitarian response programmes are well aligned with longer-term development plans and activities by supporting household coping strategies and livelihoods that benefit women and men equally.

25. In Ethiopia, for example, Government investments in the Productive Safety Net Programme and national nutrition programmes have resulted in a more predictable, cost-effective and efficient response. The Productive Safety Net Programme is based on a twin-track approach, which includes measures for immediate relief while providing livelihoods support to food-insecure households. This allows food assistance to be complemented by medium- to long-term approaches that address systemic drivers of food insecurity. The Programme's

contingency mechanism can be triggered during emergencies to rapidly scale up assistance when and where needed.

## V. Improving operational effectiveness of international humanitarian response

26. During the reporting period the international humanitarian community has continued efforts to strengthen its response to disasters. At the national level humanitarian and development actors are working together to analyse and address risks and structural causes of vulnerability and to develop a coordinated and integrated response supported by multi-year, predictable, flexible and timely funding. Members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee are reviewing ways to harmonize humanitarian and development programme cycles and tools so that funding instruments can be used to finance preparedness and resilience-building activities as effectively as possible. More concrete recommendations are expected to be included in the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session.

27. To save more lives more quickly, development and humanitarian actors need to act more quickly. Towards the end of 2011, when the first warning signs of a serious food crisis in the Sahel began to appear, aid agencies immediately launched a high-profile campaign to secure funds for early international action. This culminated in a joint visit by the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Emergency Relief Coordinator to the Sahel in March 2012.

28. Chronic poverty and lack of development are at the heart of recurrent crises. Humanitarian and development organizations recognize that to address these fundamental issues, and to support Governments' efforts to make communities more resilient, they must galvanize a wide range of partners into action. During the reporting period, the Emergency Relief Coordinator has prioritized making the international humanitarian system more inclusive of a broader range of Governments, regional organizations, the private sector and academia. For example, during the drought and famine in the Horn of Africa, the coordination activities of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat included the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the many Islamic non-governmental organizations operating under its auspices.

29. In December 2011, the heads of all member agencies of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee agreed on a set of recommendations to save more lives faster during major emergencies, particularly sudden-onset disasters. The actions, known as the Transformative Agenda, are improving leadership, coordination and accountability to all stakeholders. In implementing the agenda, the Committee has adopted protocols and guidance on how it will respond in a large-scale emergency. Mechanisms have been developed, such as a standby roster of humanitarian coordinators ready to deploy at short notice. Additionally, the Emergency Relief Coordinator has a comprehensive overview of rapid response capacities of member agencies. The Committee has tested the above tools and mechanisms through field testing and simulations, including at the heads of agency level.

30. While strengthening its systems and tools, the international humanitarian system has continued to support national-led humanitarian coordination

mechanisms. For example, in 2011 the humanitarian country team in Indonesia worked closely with the Government, which has now adopted international standards for coordinated needs assessments as part of its national legislation. In Haiti, the humanitarian clusters for agriculture and livelihoods, food aid, education, nutrition, emergency telecommunications, logistics and rubble removal have been deactivated in favour of nationally led and internationally supported coordination mechanisms.

# VI. Mandated reporting requirements

31. The present section has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/227. The mechanisms described below are part of the international community's response toolbox for when disasters strike.

32. Teams dispatched by the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination network and the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group are usually among the first international humanitarian responders to reach disaster-affected people. The teams assist with emergency communication, needs assessments, search and rescue and other vital functions. Affected Governments also use national and foreign military and civil defence assets. In recent years, the international humanitarian community has developed new partnerships with the private sector to ensure more effective disaster response.

## A. United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination network

33. The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination network was established in 1993 to help Governments respond to natural disasters. It has also assisted during complex emergencies and environmental and technological disasters. The network consists of representatives from 81 Member States and has deployed over 213 missions. During the reporting period, teams were deployed to Paraguay and Comoros to support national-led flood responses. A team was sent to the Congo to assess buildings' integrity following the explosion of the ammunitions depot in March 2012.

34. The network has also sent teams to help Governments assess their national readiness for emergencies and the possible influx of international assistance. These missions have led to strengthened links between Government and United Nations preparedness activities. For example, a mission to Sri Lanka resulted in the creation of a high-level working group within the Government to strengthen disaster preparedness.

35. Recognizing the increasingly important role played by regional organizations in humanitarian response, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination network is aligning its response tools with rapid response mechanisms of the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency.

36. In 2012, the network continued to strengthen its operations by adopting transparent rules for managing its expert rosters and strengthening its training methodologies. It will support the implementation of the Transformative Agenda of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (see para. 29 above), including by supporting the humanitarian system's readiness to deploy faster in a large-scale emergency.

## B. International Search and Rescue Advisory Group

37. The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group is a global network of more than 80 countries and organizations that come together within a United Nations framework to strengthen international urban search and rescue work. During the past decade, the Group has been instrumental in developing widely accepted procedures and systems that guide the work of national search and rescue teams, including when supporting international humanitarian response.

38. The year 2012 marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 57/150, in which the Assembly recognized the Guidelines of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group as the principal reference tool for coordinating international urban search and rescue response, and urged all States to act in conformity with them. To date, 29 urban search and rescue teams have been classified as adhering to the international minimum standards of search and rescue. By 2015, the number of teams classified by the Group is expected to reach 45, almost doubling the international certified capacity.

39. The Group has continued its efforts to strengthen national urban search and rescue capacity. An important example is the 2009 earthquake in West Sumatra, Indonesia, which damaged over 135,000 houses and killed over 1,200 people. National authorities were keen to strengthen their ability to save more people. In 2012, the Group organized a regional earthquake response simulation exercise in Indonesia, bringing together some 240 international and national search and rescue specialists from 30 countries and from non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The exercise simulated a major earthquake response in which local and international emergency teams worked together. For Indonesia's national search and rescue agency, the exercise highlighted the complexity of coordinating a large number of actors and the need for additional logistical and information management capacity.

## C. Civil-military relations in disaster response

40. The past year has witnessed a decrease in the number of externally deployed foreign military assets supporting humanitarian relief efforts. This can be partly explained by the absence of large-scale emergencies requiring major responses, and also by Member States' improved domestic capacities for response.

41. There is increased commitment by Member States and international actors to ensure that military and civil defence assets are used as effectively as possible in humanitarian response, while respecting and upholding the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. This is demonstrated by Governments adapting the guidelines on the use of foreign military and civil defence assets in disaster relief ("Oslo guidelines") and the guidelines on the use of military and civil defence assets to support United Nations humanitarian activities in complex emergencies ("MCDA guidelines") into country-specific guidelines and policies on civil-military coordination. Haiti and Pakistan are model examples of this. The guidelines were also an essential source of information for Member States on the use of military and civil defence assets during the Horn of Africa crisis in 2012.

42. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs helps to develop domestic and regional civil-military coordination capacities by conducting training sessions on United Nations humanitarian civil-military coordination guidelines.

During the reporting period, an estimated 276 Government representatives and staff members of the United Nations system, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations were trained, with a particular focus on Africa, Asia and Latin America. The Office also supported the HOPEFOR initiative led by the Dominican Republic, Qatar and Turkey, including their plans to hold annual summits and establish regional centres of excellence.

### D. Private-sector support for disaster response

43. Private-sector engagement in natural disaster response has grown significantly over the last decade. The private sector can contribute to humanitarian response in areas such as mapping of needs and resources, real-time analysis and logistics. New technology and communication tools have also led to creative and innovative solutions and changed the way humanitarian actors communicate with people who need help.

44. For example, Deutsche Post DHL has assisted the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in developing a database that will track in-kind contributions to identify outstanding needs and help reduce unsolicited donations. Deutsche Post DHL, UNDP and the Governments of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Lebanon, Nepal and Turkey have also collaborated on "Get airports ready for disasters" projects to prepare airports to receive incoming relief cargo following a natural disaster. Deutsche Post DHL also responded to national requests for logistical support in the aftermath of disasters in Chile, El Salvador and Turkey.

45. Private-sector expertise is also supporting efforts to strengthen leadership in humanitarian crises. Deloitte is supporting the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in developing strategic leadership capacity in the international humanitarian system.

46. Humanitarian actors have yet to capture and unlock the potential in the private sector, while the private sector needs to be better informed on the appropriate entry points to provide support.

## VII. Recommendations

### A. Global commitments to humanitarian action

47. Member States, non-State actors and humanitarian organizations are called upon to continue to promote greater respect for and adherence to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

48. Member States are urged to facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian personnel and relief consignments to affected communities. Safe, timely and unhindered access to people in need is a prerequisite for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance.

49. Member States and humanitarian organizations are reminded of the need to maintain the fundamentally civilian character of emergency humanitarian assistance. They are asked to ensure that foreign military assets are used only as a last resort, when unique in capability and availability, and at the request or with the consent of

the affected State. They are further asked to ensure that the use of such assets is appropriate, needs-based and timely; is coordinated with the Emergency Relief Coordinator; and is in conformity with international law and humanitarian principles as well as internationally established guidelines such as the Oslo guidelines and the MCDA guidelines, and regional and country- or context-specific guidance, where present.

## B. Programming that supports resilience

50. Member States, the United Nations system, humanitarian partners and development actors are encouraged to recognize the primary responsibility of national Governments in strengthening resilience and promoting programming that strengthens resilience.

51. Member States, the United Nations system, humanitarian partners and development actors are encouraged to embrace a comprehensive approach to addressing risk and vulnerability in disaster-prone countries. This approach should include national multi-year and multisectoral resilience goals and focus on building the resilience of the most vulnerable groups, in particular children, women and disabled people.

52. Member States are encouraged to provide timely, flexible, predictable and multi-year funding for programming that supports community resilience, including preparedness, early action and early recovery, through existing development and humanitarian funding instruments.

53. The United Nations system and humanitarian actors are called upon to continue efforts to ensure that disaster risk reduction and early recovery approaches are taken into account in humanitarian programming throughout all sectors, and to ensure that development actors are included in strategic planning at an early stage.

54. Member States, the United Nations system and humanitarian partners are urged to recognize the critical importance of disaster preparedness. In this regard, Member States are called upon to increase support for efforts by the United Nations and other humanitarian actors to strengthen the response capacity of local, regional and national actors.

55. Member States, the United Nations system, regional organizations and development and humanitarian organizations are called upon to strengthen early warning systems at all levels.

56. Member States, the United Nations system and development and humanitarian organizations are encouraged to ensure that appropriate decision-making and coordination mechanisms are in place at local, national, regional and global levels to enable the translation of early warning into timely, effective early action that is supported by commensurate, early disbursement of predictable funding.

57. Member States are encouraged to adopt policies that improve the quality of data and facilitate the open exchange of information as measures to strengthen preparedness.